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Opera under

Augustus Harris

BY

E. D. PARKER.



LONDON :

SAXON & CO.,
PUBLISHERS.

23 BOUVERIE ST.

FLEET ST.,
E.C.



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CHAPTER I.

THE INTERREGNUM.

THE career of the great impressario, who passed away from us in 1896, forms the most important epoch in the recent operatic history of this country.

But to rightly estimate the immense influence he exercised over operatic matters between the years 1887 and 1896, the state of affairs during the interregnum, which the interval between the close of the Gye régime in 1884 and the Drury Lane season of 1887 may not inappropriately be called, should be first considered.

Before, however, doing so, it may be well to briefly summarize, as follows, the principal events which have occurred since Sir Augustus Harris first became associated with opera in this country :—

- I. The old rule, which permitted no language but the Italian one to be used at a grand season, has been abolished ; and that system which, for the sake of convenience, may be termed the cosmopolitan one, has been established in its place.
- II. The popularity of legitimate opera appears to have revived considerably between the years 1887 and 1896.
- III. Operatic performances are now carried out more intelligently, and the works themselves are placed on the stage in a more satisfactory manner than was the case in the years preceding 1887.

IV. The old school of Italian opera as represented by Rossini, Donizetti, and Bellini, appears to have lost its hold over a London audience; while the influence of Wagner appears to have gained considerable ground.

The last result, however, is equally noticeable in France, where, in spite of the great prejudice formerly felt against the Beyreuth master, there are now few works more popular than his in the répertoire of the Paris Grand Opera.

In the following pages no attempt will be made to give a systematic account of the various productions under the Harris operatic régime; as this brief work aims merely at being a sketch of the more prominent events which took place immediately before, and during that period.

To begin with 1884:

After a tenancy of Covent Garden, which had extended over a considerable number of years, Mr. Gye gave his last season at that theatre in the summer of 1884; and as, at the beginning of the following year, the principal opera house in London was still vacant, it appeared highly probable that there would be no grand season in 1885; and this might have been the case, had not Mr. Mapleson been forthcoming.

An early season by the Carl Rosa Company, at Drury Lane, was a success, its most important events being the production of a new opera, by the late Mr. Goring Thomas, and the introduction of one from the pen of M. Massinet. The former's "Nadeshda," with Madame Valleria in the principal part, was much admired; and it cannot but be regretted that this work should now be so rarely heard.

As regards M. Massinet's "Manon," it has since become so well known that it will be sufficient here to relate that Madame Marie Roye and Mr. Joseph Maas took the principal parts. At Covent Garden, Mr. Mapleson announced a short Italian season, under the star system; Madame Patti to take part in

every performance, and Signor Arditto to be the conductor. The start was disastrous, for "La Traviata," in which the great prima donna was to have made her rentrée, was postponed. The viciousness of the star system was here well exemplified; Madame Patti, being indisposed, there was no one to take her place, and the season began a week later than was originally intended.

She subsequently appeared in "La Traviata," "Semiramide," "Il Barbiere," "Marta," "Faust," "Linda di Chamonix," and "Carmen."

In "Semiramide," the greatest of Rossinian singers was supported by Madame Scalchi, with the happiest results and by Signor del Puente, for whom the music of Assur lay too low. In the same composer's "Il Barbiere," she was somewhat indifferently supported by M. Engel, who was unsuited to the part of Count Almaviva.

The performance of "Faust," apart from Madame Patti's charming impersonation of Goethe's heroine, was remarkable for the Valentine of Signor de Anna, the possessor of an immense baritone voice.

Madame Patti was not well advised in undertaking the part of Carmen, which she did for the first time this year, as the music is unsuited to her voice. She appeared twice in this part; but vocally she was excelled by Mesdames Trebelli and Lucca, and, as far as concerns acting, by Mesdames Galli-Marié (the créatrice) and Minnie Hauk.

In addition to the above, a few extra performances were given: Mdlle. Föhstrom making her London début in "La Somnambula," and subsequently appearing in "Rigoletto," and "Lucia di Lammermoor."

The season closed with a performance of "Il Trovatore," Madame Patti as Leonora. It being her twenty-fifth operatic season in London, an address was presented to her by Mr. Mapleson at the close of the performance, and the crowd afterwards drew her carriage through the streets, and escorted her home.

The season, during which no new works were produced, was a failure, and it cannot be said to have been an artistic success; but it taught managers the lesson that an operatic enterprise, relying solely on one great star, is rarely successful.

Delibes' "Lakme," with Mdlle. Marie van Zandt in the principal part, was heard this year in London for the first time at a French season, given by Mr. Mayer, at the Gaiety.

The operatic records of 1885 would hardly be complete without mentioning the production of Gounod's "Mors et Vita," at the Birmingham Festival. The great composer was unable to be present in England to personally conduct the first performance, but his place was ably filled by Herr Richter, and two very fine performances of the work were given by that incomparable oratorio quartett, Mèsdames Albani and Patey, and MM. Lloyd and Santly.

"Mors et Vita," though not so powerful or so original as her elder sister the "Redemption," is a work of great beauty and lofty conception; although it has not maintained its hold over the public, and is now rarely heard in this country.

1885 was not a very satisfactory year as regards opera; but of the following year a much better account can be given, and Covent Garden, under the energetic management of Signor Lago, began to regain some of its former prestige.

At the beginning of 1886, English music sustained an irreparable loss in the death of the celebrated tenor, Mr. Joseph Maas. Successful alike on the Italian and English operatic stages, and on the oratorio and concert platforms, he took his place with Mr. Lloyd in the front rank of English tenors; and it is not too much to say that the place he then left vacant has never been filled up, and that Mr. Lloyd has since been left without a rival.

The most important event of the Carl Rosa season at Drury Lane was the production of Sir (then Mr.) A. C. Mackenzie's "Troubadour."

The direction of affairs at Covent Garden was taken in hand by Signor Lago, who endeavoured to secure the services

both of Mesdames Patti and Nilsson ; but, as the impresario wished on all occasions to give thoroughly good, all-round performances, the salaries of those prime donne proved to be prohibitive, and their engagements fell through. The list announced was nevertheless a strong one, and included Mesdames Albani, de Cepeda, Ella Russell, Valda (the last two being new to London), and Scalchi ; Signori Gayarré, Runcio, Marini, Maurel, Pandolfini, Francesco d'Andrade, Pinto, and Monti, with Signor Bevignani as conductor.

The season opened with "Lucrezia Borgia." Madame de Cepeda, who took the part of Lucrezia, played it perhaps as well as it had been played in this country since Mdlle. Titiens made her last appearance in that character, on the 28th of May, 1877.

A Russian mezzo-soprano, Mdlle. Lubatovi, appeared for the first time in England on this occasion, and suffered under the disadvantage of appearing in the part of Maffeo Orsini, for the first time on any stage. By far the most interesting part of the performance, however, was the re-appearance of Signor Gayarré, after some years' absence from Covent Garden. The Spanish tenor may have had many faults, and may at times have been somewhat prone to exaggeration ; but there was no tenor then, and there certainly has been none since, who could compare with him in such parts as Gennaro and Alfonso in "La Favorita." As usual, he introduced the air, "Deserto in terra," from Donizetti's forgotten opera, "Don Sebastiano," with great effect.

Signor Gayarré, at that time leading tenor at the Grand Opera, had just arrived from Paris, after a series of almost unexampled triumphs in "L'Africaine," and other operas. Signor Pandolfini, as Duke Alfonso, was all that could be desired ; and the orchestra, mainly composed of members of the Philharmonic band, was of first-rate quality.

The chorus in "Lucrezia" have little to do, but that little they did extremely well.

The same opera was given again later in the season, with

some alterations ; Signori Runcio and Pinto replacing Gayarré and Pandolfini.

“Rigoletto,” given during the first week, introduced two artists, who have since become very well known to London opera-goers, Mdlle. Ella Russell and Signor Francesco d’Andrade. Mdlle. Russell made a highly successful début as Gilda, and Signor d’Andrade at once showed himself to be a baritone of the first rank and an excellent actor. He afterwards appeared as Valentine, in “Faust,” with distinct success ; on which occasion Madame Albani made her rentrée for the season, after a two years’ absence from the London operatic stage. So well known is the great Canadian prima donna’s Marguerite, that it is almost needless to say that she secured her customary triumph in that part. She was ably supported by Signor Gayarré, as Faust.

The production of “Les Huguenots,” introduced Mdlle. Teodorini, a prima donna dramatica of high rank, as Valentine ; and, with Mdlle. Russell as the Queen, Madame Scalchi as Urbano, Signor Gayarré as Raoul, Signor d’Andrade as de Nevers, and Signor Pandolfini as San Bris, a fine performance was given.

Revivals of Ponchielli’s “La Gioconda,” with Mdlle. Teodorini in the principal part ; and of Verdi’s “Un Ballo in Maschera,” were given.

In Verdi’s fine opera, which deserves a more frequent hearing, Madame de Cepeda appeared as Amalia, Signor Gayarré as Riccardo, and Signor d’Andrade, whose rendering of “Eri tu” was especially noteworthy, as Renato. On this occasion also Madame Valda as the page, made a distinct advance in public favour.

Signor Lago was unfortunate in losing for many weeks the services of Signor Gayarré, through illness ; a contemplated revival of Meyerbeer’s “L’Africaine” being abandoned in consequence.

“Don Giovanni,” for the rentrée of M. Maurel, was interesting ; Mesdames de Cepeda and Valda, as Donnas Anna and

Elvira respectively, were highly successful, but the dramatic Mdlle. Teodorini found the light part of Zerlina unsuited to her talents.

A strong combination cast, consisting of Mesdames Albani, Russell, and Scalchi, and MM. Maurel and d'Andrade, in "Le Nozze di Figaro," was also worthy of note.

Towards the end of the season, a fine performance of "Lohengrin" was given, with Madame Albani, the most sympathetic of Elsas, and Signor Gayarré, happily recovered, in the two leading parts. On this occasion, a native artist Miss Josephine York, made her début on the Italian stage as Ortruda.

The first honours of the season were undoubtedly won by Madame Albani who, in addition to the operas already mentioned, appeared in "Rigoletto," associated with M. Maurel, in the part of the jester, though Mesdames Teodorini, de Cepeda, Russell, Valda, and Scalchi, all did yeoman service. The baritones, including MM. Maurel, d'Andrade, and Pandolfini, were strong, but the basses were weak.

The season was an artistic, and, to a certain extent, a financial success.

A few words will be sufficient to deal with an autumn season of French opera at Her Majesty's; the most interesting feature of which was the introduction of Madame Galli-Marié, the original Carmen of the Opera Comique, to a London audience. Her impersonation of Bizet's heroine, as far as acting was concerned, has never been surpassed, and she made the best possible use of the somewhat limited vocal means at her disposal.

"Faust," with Madame Fides Defries and M. Vergnet (since so well known at the Paris Grand Opera), and "Rigoletto," were also given; but these performances were not satisfactory, and both chorus and orchestra were beneath contempt. Small houses were the rule, and the season ended somewhat tamely with performances of "Madame Angot" and similar works.

The result might have been different had the management relied on the essentially French form of art, exemplified by the operas of Auber and Hérold ; for these works are so rarely heard in this country, that their appearance would have been a most welcome novelty.

Signor Lago's 1887 season, his last summer one at Covent Garden was conducted on similar lines to the one of 1886.

It opened with "La Favorita," in which opera Madame Media Mei, who made her London début as Leonora, failed to some extent to sustain the very high reputation which had preceded her to this country ; but Signori Gayarré and d'Andrade could not well have been surpassed as Fernando and Alfonso respectively.

"Rigoletto," with Mdlle. Russell as Gilda and M. Devoyod as the jester, was an excellent performance.

"L'Africaine" was announced with a débutante, Mdlle. Rossini, and MM. Gayarré and Devoyod ; but the performance, as was the case in the preceding year, never took place.

"Guilliaume Tell," unfortunately so rarely heard in this country, was given, with M. Devoyod, a splendid Tell, who was somewhat indifferently supported by Signor Prévost, in the great roll of Arnold.

Mdlle. Ella Russell was a charming Mathilde, and the magnificent overture and choruses were well rendered, under Signor Bevignani.

Madame Albani appeared in "Faust," "Lucia," and "I Puritani," with the usual satisfactory results ; and, with Madame Scalchi and MM. Gayarré and Devoyod, took part in the production of Glinka's "La Vita per lo Tsar," an opera which met with considerable temporary success.

"Lucrezia Borgia" was given with much the same cast as in the preceding year, and the only new feature in "Lohen-grin" was Madame de Cepeda's assumption of the part of Ortruda.

"Les Huguenots" introduced a pleasing new soprano, Madame Sandra, who, through nervousness, did not do herself

complete justice as Valentina. Her voice, however, was hardly powerful enough for so exacting a part.

Late in the season, Signor Cotogni joined the company, and appeared as Don Giovanni. The season closed with Glinka's "La Vita per lo Tsar."

Unfortunately, partly owing to the other opera seasons at Drury Lane and Her Majesty's (which will be dealt with later), and partly also to the various other attractions of the Jubilee year, the season was not a financial success.

As regards the work done, but one opera new to London was produced; but many well-known works secured excellent interpretations. The company was a strong one, except as regards the basses; in which department there was no singer of first-rate quality.

Among the sopranos, Madame Albani proved herself, as usual, a tower of strength; and much useful work was done by Mesdames de Cepeda, Valda, Ella Russell, and Scalchi. There was but one tenor of first-rate quality, Signor Gayarré, and on him most of the work of the season devolved.

MM. Devoyod and d'Andrade divided the work of the baritones till the last week or so, when they were joined by Signor Cotogni.

This proved to be Signor Lago's last grand opera season at Covent Garden.



CHAPTER II.

THE START AT DRURY LANE.

THE year 1887 was a remarkable one, on account of the exceptionally large number of operatic enterprises which distinguished it. Early in the year it became known that Signor Lago would have to encounter a most formidable antagonist in Sir (then Mr.) Augustus Harris, at Drury Lane.

The ball was opened by Mr. Mapleson, with an early season at Covent Garden, during which two quasi-novelties, Gounod's "Mirella" and Bizet's "Les Pêcheurs de Perles," and a revival of Gluck's "Orfeo," were promised.

The venture opened with "La Traviata," which introduced Madame Nordica, a singer who has since taken a firm hold over the British public, and who is now second only to Madame Albani, as an oratorio soprano. "La Traviata" was followed by "Rigoletto," with Madame Nordica again as the heroine; Signor Ravelli, as a capable Duke; and the once celebrated tenor, M. Lherie (the original Don José in "Carmen"), as Rigoletto. M. Lherie, appearing now as a baritone, was a fine actor, but suffered from a pronounced vibrato. A large number of prime donne appeared during the season.

Mdlle. Marie Engle, making her début in London, appeared with great credit as Zerlina, in "Don Giovanni," with Signor de Padilla in the title roll. Madame Hastreiter, who made her début as Leonora in "La Favorita," displayed a fine mezzo-

soprano voice, and an imposing stage presence. M. Caylus, a useful tenor, made his entry as Faust to the Marguerite of Madame Nordica.

"Mirella," produced late in the season for Madame Nevada, was a success; but "Les Pêcheurs de Perles," in spite of the efforts of Mdlle. Föhstrom Signor Garulli and M. Lherie, was hardly considered worthy of the composer of "Carmen."

At the close of the season, Mr. Mapleson announced that he would re-open a month later at Her Majesty's. The undertaking, therefore, must have been a financial success, and much of its artistic merit was due to Signor Logheder, who conducted throughout.

At Drury Lane, proceedings commenced with a series of representations by the Carl Rosa Company; the most important item being the production of "Lohengrin," in English; on which occasion, Madame Marie Roze was the Elsa, and Mr. Macguckin the Lohengrin.

The most satisfactory performance in the opera was that of Madame Tremelli, in the part of Ortruda, who, in spite of an indifferent English pronunciation, has rarely been surpassed in this part. Both chorus and orchestra, under Mr. Goosens, did well. "Lohengrin" certainly sounds better in English than in Italian, but that, however, is the case with most operas written to a German libretto. On the other hand, French operas sound better in Italian than in English, on account of the greater similarity between the two first-named languages.

Mr. Mapleson's second season at Her Majesty's went on simultaneously with those at Covent Garden and Drury Lane. Donizetti's "Lucia di Lammermoor," on the opening night, introduced an excellent Lucia in Mdlle. Broch; but the most interesting events of the season were the re-appearance on the operatic stage of the great contralto, Madame Trebelli, and the production of Beethoven's "Fidelio."

Madame Trebelli made her rentrée as Siebel in "Faust," and subsequently appeared as Carmen, in which part, as far as the music is concerned, she has never been surpassed; the

character, however, of Prosper Merimée's heroine is of too vulgar a type for so refined an artist as the French contralto to faithfully have interpreted.

The performance of Madame Lilli Lehmann as Leonora, in "Fidelio," was beyond praise, and can hardly have been equalled since the days of Teresa Titiens. Boito's "Mefistofele," with Mesdames Oselio and Trebelli and Signori Oxilia and Abramoff, was produced.

Madame Patti, announced for a few performances, only appeared once, in "La Traviata." "Il Barbiere" was then advertised, but Madame Patti did not appear; and a free performance of "Carmen," with Madame Trebelli, was given in place of Rossini's opera.

The season came to a somewhat abrupt conclusion, and was a failure; although such performances as those of "Fidelio" and "Carmen," at popular prices, should have attracted larger audiences.

Signor Lago's operations at Covent Garden have been already described.

Sir Augustus Harris' Italian season at Drury Lane, the most important operatic event of 1887, was the last of the three to commence. The prospectus announced few names known to London amateurs; but it was stated that the greatest care had been used in selecting artists from the principal opera houses in Europe.

Madame Kupfer-Berger, from the Madrid opera, headed the list, with Mesdames Borelli, Nordica, Hauk, and Engle among the sopranos; and Mesdames Tremelli and Fabbri, as the principal contraltos. The tenors, headed by Monsieur Jean de Reszke, who had recently succeeded Signor Gayarré as leading tenor at the Paris Grand opera, included Signori de Lucia and Runcio. Madame Tremelli and Signor Runcio had been members of the Carl Rosa Company, which had recently performed at Drury Lane. The baritones were Monsieur Victor Maurel, and Signori Pandolfini, del Puente, and Battistini; and the basses, which were exceptionally strong, included M. Eduard

de Reszke and Signori Navarini and Foli. Signor Luigi Mancinelli, from the Madrid opera, was commander of the forces.

Performances of "Les Huguenots," with the last act, and of Gounod's "Faust," with the ballet music, as given at the Paris opera, were promised. Chorus and orchestra were to be composed of the Carl Rosa Company, augmented and strengthened for the occasion.

The season commenced two days after the termination of the Carl Rosa one at the same theatre. The start, so memorable a one in operatic history, was made with Verdi's "Aïda." The Aïda of the evening, Madame Kupfer-Berger, displayed a powerful soprano voice, able to hold its own in the most trying concerted music, while her acting throughout was most appropriate; but Madame Fabbri was slightly overtasked in the great roll of Amneris, which would have been suited better to Madame Tremelli.

Rhadames was in the hands of M. Jean de Reszke. This great artist had appeared in London some years before as a baritone, under Mr. Mapleson's management, with comparatively small success; but on this occasion made his début as a tenor. As soon as "Celeste Aïda" was reached, he had carried all before him, and the audience realized that an exceptional tenor was before them.

Signor Pandolfini played the part of Amonasro with conspicuous power; and Signor Navarini made a successful début as the high priest Ramfis, singing the trying music of that part with great effect.

The orchestra, under Signor Mancinelli, was extremely good, though, at times, they were permitted to overpower the soloists. The staging of "Aïda" was magnificent, and such scenic effects had not been seen in our opera houses for many years.

The undertaking was carried on with great energy; and a fresh opera was mounted on each night of the first week, "Aïda" having been given on a Monday. Verdi was again to the fore on the second night, with "La Traviata," in the hands

of Madame Nordica and Signori de Lucia, a light tenor, who made his London début on this occasion, and del Puente.

In the early days of the season, débuts were made by Mesdames Borelli and Torresella and Signor Battistini.

Madame Borelli, a dramatic soprano, well known in Italy, had passed her prime; and after appearing as Norma and Donna Anna, was not heard again.

"Rigoletto" introduced Madame Torresella as Gilda, and Signor Battistini, a high baritone, who did not appear to possess any very striking qualities, as Rigoletto. "Lohengrin" had originally been intended for the first week, but its production was, perhaps wisely, deferred till the second.

Madame Kupfer-Berger, who appeared as Elsa, failed, to some extent, to sustain the high opinion formed of her in "Aïda," and retired early in the season from the company.

M. Jean de Reszke, as Lohengrin, was a complete success, and proved himself to be one of the best impersonators of that part ever seen in London. His brother, M. Eduard de Reszke, who is, perhaps, the greatest male artist on the operatic stage, appeared as King Henry the Fowler.

Madame Tremelli on this occasion, as throughout the season when this opera was performed, gave her grandly dramatic reading of the part of Ortruda; and Signor Navarini, in the thankless roll of the Herald, sang his trying music to perfection. "Lohengrin" was well staged; and to Signor Mancinelli and his orchestra, the highest praise was awarded.

M. Maurel made his entry as Don Giovanni. The great baritone, fresh from triumphs in the first performances of Verdi's "Otello" at Milan, proved of the greatest service throughout the season. The only other circumstances of note in the production of Mozart's masterpiece were, an excellent performance of Donna Elvira by Madame Nordica, and the appearance of Signor Navarini as Leporello, a performance vocally acceptable, but devoid of humour.

It will be seen that, thus early in the season, the management was deprived of the services of the two dramatic prime

donee of whom so much had been expected ; but Madame Nordica came bravely to the rescue, and for the rest of the season bore the chief brunt of the battle.

It is also noticeable that, though such good performances had been given, the public did not attend in sufficient numbers to make them a financial success ; with the result that the prices of admission were reduced to the ordinary theatre scale, and the enterprise became an assured pecuniary failure.

After the departure of Madame Kupfer-Berger, the part of Elsa was given to Madame Hauk ; who appeared oftener, however, as Carmen, to which part she was much better suited, with complete success.

The two most interesting productions of the season were those of Gounod's "Faust" and "Les Huguenots."

In Gounod's opera, Madame Nordica, as at Mr. Mapleson's early season, was a charming Marguerite ; and the great trio, MM. de Reszke and Maurel, took respectively the parts of Faust, Valentine, and Mefistofiles. The ballet scene, as performed at the Paris Grand Opera, was introduced after the second act, for the first time in this country, and became a great attraction. Unfortunately, however, through the use of steam in the representation of clouds, both music and dramatic fitness were sacrificed to scenic effect ; for a loud hissing sound was produced which drowned the beautiful finale of the opera. Happily this objectionable practice was soon afterwards discontinued.

The production of Meyerbeer's masterpiece was also a quasi-novelty, since the last act is so rarely heard in this country. The performance was a memorable one. Madame Nordica was Valentina, Mdlle. Engle Queen Margherita, M. Jean de Reszke Raoul, M. Maurel de Nevers, M. Eduard de Reszke, San Bris, and Signor Foli Marcello. The assumption by Madame Nordica of the great role of Valentina, usually associated with the dramatic soprano, was in itself something of a novelty ; but the result was extremely successful.

The remainder of the season was taken up with repetitions

of "Faust," "Carmen," "Les Huguenots," and "Aïda"; but towards the end, a very successful début was made by Mdlle. Sigrid Arnoldsen, a Swedish artist, with a light soprano voice of sympathetic quality.

The season closed with Gounod's "Faust." Its most important feature, besides being Sir Augustus Harris' first operatic venture, was the introduction of M. Jean de Reszke to this country as a tenor. From an artistic point of view, the undertaking was a success; but financially, it was a failure, for the cheap prices were not sufficient to cover the enormous outlay incurred.

Thus, of the three Italian summer seasons of 1887, it will be seen that two of them were financial failures, while the Covent Garden one did not fare much better. The following valuable lessons, however, were learnt by impressarios:—first, that in London there is room but for one operatic enterprise at a time; secondly, that the London public supports but one Opera House, and that house is Covent Garden.



CHAPTER III.

THE MOVE TO COVENT GARDEN.

IN 1888, the Carl Rosa Company abandoned their usual Drury Lane season ; and no operatic enterprise of any kind was started before the month of May. Another season at Covent Garden, under Signor Lago, had, at first been anticipated ; but early in the year, it became known that Sir Augustus Harris had secured the lease of that theatre ; so the latter had the great advantage of being alone in the field.

Of this advantage he made good use, and issued an exceedingly attractive prospectus, in which the names of the following occurred :—Mesdames Albani, Nordica, Ella Russell, Fursh-Madi, Macintyre (an English *débutante*), Arnoldsen, Hauk, Trebelli, Scalchi, Hastreiter, and Zeppilli-Villani ; MM. Jean de Reszke, Ravelli, de Rheims, Lassalle, Cottogni, del Puente, Pandolfini (who did not appear), Novara, Navarini, and Eduard de Reszke, with Signori Mancinelli and Randegger as conductors.

Signor Francesco d'Andrade, whose name did not appear in the original list, subsequently joined the company.

The season was to have opened with Donizetti's "Lucia di Lammermoor," for the *début* of Madame Melba ; but this arrangement was cancelled, and the same master's "Lucrezia Borgia," was given in its place. In the last-named opera, Madame Fursh-Madi gave a somewhat conventional rendering of the title roll, and Signor Ravelli's Gennaro, although a creditable performance, did not shine by comparison with Signor Gayarré's version of the same part, under Signor Lago

in 1887. In the part of the Duke, Signor Navarini had ample opportunities for displaying his fine voice. Lastly, Madame Trebelli gave that most charming and artistic performance of Maffeo Orsini, which first introduced her to the London public.

The most unsatisfactory feature of the evening was the composition of the orchestra, which, though containing some fine instrumentalists, was below the mark as regards the rank and file; and did not come up to the standard of the Drury Lane band of the preceding year. A special feature of the season was to be the addition of an extra amateur chorus in the Grand Operas.

The next performance was one of "Carmen;" the chief part in which was somewhat unwisely essayed by Madame Nordica, a rôle to which that highly talented prima donna was unsuited. Later in the week, "La Traviata" was produced for the rentrée of Mdlle. Ella Russell, fresh from triumphs in Russia; and on the last night of the opening week, Madame Albani made her entry as Marguerite, in Gounod's "Faust." It should be noted that this was the Canadian prima donna's first appearance under the auspices of Sir Augustus Harris. In this opera she was associated with M. de Rheims as Faust, an impassioned actor with a somewhat pronounced vibrato, who left the company early in the season.

M. Jean de Reszke, not being available till the beginning of June, all the work of the tenor department fell upon Signor Ravelli, who appeared in every opera which contained a leading tenor part, till the arrival of the Polish artist.

Madame Albani appeared in "La Traviata" and "Rigoletto," with the usual happy results.

In the last-named opera, an extremely successful début was made by Madame Zeppilli-Villani, who, unfortunately, did not again appear during the season. Signor d'Andrade was an interesting and original Rigoletto. About this period of the season it was remarked that the orchestra began to show signs of improvement.

"Don Giovanni" was mounted with Madame Fursh-Madi, a highly dramatic Donna Anna ; Madame Rolla, who undertook the part at short notice, in place of Mdlle. Macintyre, an effective Donna Elvira ; Mdlle. Arnoldsen, a sprightly Zerlina ; Signor d'Andrade, a highly acceptable Don ; and the ever-ready Signor Ravelli, a tuneful Don Ottavio. The production of the same great master's "Le Nozze di Figaro," with Mesdames Albani, Russell, and Arnoldsen, and Signori del Puente and Cotogni (Figaro), was interesting, and gave the hard-worked Signor Ravelli a rest.

The arrival of the brothers de Reszke and M. Lassalle, from Paris, at the beginning of June, enabled the management to produce some of those operas which demand a tenore robusto. The trio made their entry in Meyerbeer's "L'Africaine." The part of Selika, like that of Carmen, was unsuited to Madame Nordica's conspicuous talents. As Inez, Mdlle. Macintyre, who had previously made a most successful début, as Michaela, in "Carmen," was vocally all that could be desired, though her acting of necessity showed signs of stage inexperience. M. Jean de Reszke, as Vasco di Gama, was not in good voice. M. Lassalle was a superb Nelusco.

The extra chorus, previously referred to, performed in this opera, but did not cover themselves with glory.

"Don Giovanni" was repeated, M. Lassalle replacing Signor d'Andrade ; and Gounod's "Faust" was given with a very strong cast, including MM. de Reszke and M. Lassalle.

This performance is memorable, as being Madame Trebelli's last appearance on the operatic stage. Shortly afterwards, the great contralto was seized with that painful affliction from which she never completely recovered ; and, although she was able to again appear on the concert platform, it was as Siebel, that opera-goers said farewell to one of the most accomplished singers and one of the greatest operatic artists of our time.

The production of Mozart's "Il Flauto Magico" was not altogether satisfactory ; though Mdlle. Russell was fairly successful in the difficult roll of Astrifiammante, and the orchestra,

under Signor Randegger, played better than they had hitherto done during the season.

The introduction into this opera of the minuet, from its great composer's E flat symphony, quite contrary, it is needless to say, to his intentions, was a piece of very bad taste.

Other performances of note were those of "Les Huguenots," with almost identically the same cast as at Drury Lane in 1887, and of Verdi's "Un Ballo in Maschera" and "Il Trovatore." Mesdames Rolla and Fursh-Madi appearing respectively in the two last-named operas.

Rossini's "Guilliaume Tell" was produced. M. Lassalle was, in every respect, an ideal Tell. Miss Macintyre as Mathilde, and M. Eduard de Reszke as Walter, were also more than equal to their parts, and the performance would have been completely satisfactory had the great roll of Arnold been in the hands of a first-rate tenor.

Rossini was also represented by "Il Barbiere," but that comic masterpiece was not an unqualified success, and the London public seems to care little now for legitimate comic opera.

The same fate met Auber's "Fra Diavolo": it cannot be denied, however, that the illustrious French master's works, though admirably adapted to a theatre like the late Opera Comique in Paris, are somewhat out of place in so large a building as Covent Garden.

Perhaps the two most successful productions of the season were those of "Lohengrin" and "Aïda." "Lohengrin" was presented with a powerful cast; Madame Albani as a superb Elsa; Mdlle. Hastreiter as a most satisfactory Ortruda; M. Jean de Reszke, as Lohengrin, at length associated with an Elsa worthy of him; and Signori d'Andrade, Navarini, and Eduard de Reszke, as exponents respectively of the parts of Telramondo, the Herald, and the King. The opera was afterwards repeated with an equally powerful Ortruda, in Madame Fursh-Madi.

The single performance of "Aïda," at the end of the season,

was an unqualified triumph for Madame Nordica ; and the revival of Boîto's "Mefistofile," also in the last week, was most welcome. The parts of Marguerite and Elena, which, as in Madame Nilsson's case, are usually taken by the same artist, were on this occasion divided, and given respectively to Mesdames Macintyre and Ella Russell. The former, who was admirably suited to her part, appeared to even greater advantage than she had hitherto done. Signor Ravelli, labouring under the disadvantage of performing with a Marguerite taller than himself, was a capable Faust, and a splendid Mefistofiles was found in M. de Reszke. The opera was admirably staged ; and the Brocken scene especially was most realistic and well designed.

One of the most important events of this memorable season was the début of Madame Melba as Lucia : an artist who has since become so well known and so enormously popular in this country that any further comments on the subject are needless.

As regards the season generally, it is important as being the first one given by Sir Augustus Harris at Covent Garden, and, both in a pecuniary and in an artistic sense, may be regarded as eminently satisfactory. A long list of operas was performed, and a considerable number of prime donne appeared during the season. From this year, up to the time of his death, the impresario had no real rival in London.

Towards the end of 1888, a Russian opera company gave some performances at the Novelty Theatre. The season opened with Rubenstein's "Il Demonio," an opera which, when produced at Covent Garden under Mr. Gye, with Mesdames Albani and Trebelli and M. Lassalle, did not receive much encouragement, so that, with second-rate artists, it was hardly likely to fare any better at the Novelty. A great success was, nevertheless, obtained by a young Russian baritone, M. Winogradow, in the part of the demon. The whole undertaking was very badly advertised, and partly owing to this cause, and partly to the fact that "Il Demonio" was given at each performance, the venture ended in failure. In fact, so

complete was the failure, that the unfortunate members of the company were stranded in London, without the means of returning to their native country.

The operatic history of 1888 would be incomplete without mention being made of Madame Christine Nilsson's withdrawal from public life in the spring of that year. Two farewell concerts were given at the Albert Hall. In the first, which was a matinée, and the most interesting of the two, the Swedish prima donna was associated with her old companion-in-arms, Madame Trebelli. In the duet, "La Luna Immobile," they recalled that splendid first performance of Boïto's "Mefistofile" at Her Majesty's. The jewel song from "Faust" reminded opera-goers of the most charming of all Marguerites; while the balcony scene from "Lohengrin" brought back to mind the most poetic Elsa on the stage.

The programme of the second concert was not so well-chosen as was that of the first, which had consisted solely of extracts from Madame Nilsson's most admired parts. The scene at the end, however, was indescribable when, after numerous recalls, the jewel song from "Faust" brought to a close the public career of one of the greatest operatic artists the world has ever seen.

The summer of 1889 was, like that of 1887, remarkable on account of its three operatic seasons; the first of which to commence was the one at Covent Garden. The published list of artists closely resembled that of the preceding year; Mesdames Albani, Nordica, Melba, Ella Russell, Fursh-Madi, Macintyre, and Scalchi, MM. Jean and Eduard de Reszke, Lassalle, Francesco d'Andrade, and others, being re-engaged; while the name of Madame Valda was added to the list, and M. Talazac, the celebrated Opera Comique tenor, and Signor Antonio d'Andrade were to make their first bows at Covent Garden. Madame Toni-Schlager, a dramatic soprano, from the Vienna Imperial Opera, and Mdlle. Marie van Zandt, were also announced. Several new tenors were to appear, and the mistake of having too few was not repeated.

Three conductors were announced: Signori Mancinelli, Randegger, and Arditi.

Wagner's "Die Meistersinger," for the first time, in Italian, and revivals of "Le Prophète," "Romeo," and "Les Pêcheurs de Perles," were promised.

The season commenced with the last-named opera; Mdlle. Russell taking the part of Leila, and M. Talazac making his first appearance. It is to be regretted that the accomplished French tenor did not appear in London earlier in his career. Bizet's opera was only once repeated. Gounod's "Faust," with Mdlle. Macintyre as Marguerite, introduced M. Montariol, a capable actor and singer, in the title roll. M. Winogradow, who, it will be remembered, had been a member of the ill-fated Russian opera company, which visited this country in 1887, was the Valentine, but did not appear to such advantage at Covent Garden as in the smaller theatre.

"Carmen," with Madame Marie Roze as the heroine, introduced Signor Antonio d'Andrade, the possessor of a small but well-trained tenor voice.

"Aïda" was given with Madame Valda and Signor Antonio d'Andrade as Aïda and Rhadames respectively, neither of whom appeared to be particularly well suited to their parts; and "Mefistofile," with Mdlle. Macintyre, brought forth yet another new tenor, Signor Massimi, who appeared as Faust.

But nothing of any note took place till the arrival of the trio from the Grand Opera; when "Aïda" was again given, with Madame Nordica and M. de Reszke in place of Madame Valda and Signor Antonio d'Andrade.

During the same week, a very fine performance of "Le Nozze di Figaro" was given, under Signor Randegger, with Mesdames Albani, Russell, Van Zandt (a charming Cherubino), and Signori Cotogni and Francesco d'Andrade in the principal parts. Wagner's "Lohengrin," with much the same cast as in 1888, was performed; M. Seguin, a powerful baritone, making his début on this occasion.

The revival of Gounod's "Romeo" at Covent Garden,

created considerable interest, as the opera had been much talked of on its recent transfer from the Paris Opera Comique to the Grand Opera. The work had previously belonged exclusively to the répertoire of the smaller house ; but an additional interest was attached to its production at the larger one, from the fact that Madame Patti, who had not appeared for many years at that establishment, was to take the part of Juliette at the first few performances. The Diva was supported in Paris by M. Jean de Reszke, as Romeo, and M. Eduard de Reszke, as the Friar. When the opera was produced at Covent Garden, Madame Melba took the part of Juliette, and the brothers de Reszke resumed the parts they had so successfully filled at the Grand Opera, while all the minor characters were in exceptionally strong hands ; such artists as MM. Montariol, Seguin, Winogradow, and Castelmary taking comparatively small parts.

The performance of this opera in French, as in Paris, was a most important innovation, since it marked the beginning of that system of presenting operas in their own languages, which Sir Augustus Harris afterwards so generally adopted.

The production of "Les Huguenots" introduced Madame Schlager, who suffered under the disadvantage of singing the part of Valentina for the first time in the Italian language. The remaining parts were in the well-known hands of Mesdames Russell and Scalchi, and MM. J. and E. de Reszke, F. d'Andrade, and Lassalle. On this occasion, M. Eduard de Reszke, who has no equal in his old part of St. Bris, commenced taking that of Marcello.

The performance of "Rigoletto" showed how rapidly Madame Melba's popularity was increasing in this country.

The most important enterprise up till then undertaken by the Harris régime was the production of Wagner's "Die Meistersinger," in Italian. A capital libretto was provided for the purpose by Signor Mazzucato, and the work was sung by the greatest artists that the London and Paris operatic stages could

produce. Madame Albani, as Eva, M. Jean de Reszke, as Walther, and M. Lassalle, as Hans Sachs, were certainly superior to most of the German artists usually heard in these parts, and all the minor parts were in the most capable hands. Monsieur Isnardon, an artist new to London, took the part of Beckmesser, with refined humour, and Madame Bauermeister and MM. Montariol and Abramoff contributed largely to the efficiency of the performance.

The season closed with a final repetition of the opera; Madame Valda replacing Madame Albani in the part of Eva. Signor Mancinelli merits the greatest praise for securing so good an interpretation of this work.

Speaking generally of the season, it was a very successful one, its most interesting features being the productions of "Romeo," in French, and Wagner's "Die Meistersinger," in Italian. "Le Prophète," which had been promised, was not performed. Of the new singers who appeared during the season, none have obtained any great popularity in this country.

As regards the two other operatic ventures of 1889, Mr. Mapleson's, at Her Majesty's, was the next to begin; Mr. Mayer's season at the Lyceum only starting late in the summer.

Comparisons between these two seasons are most interesting; the one was devoted almost exclusively to works of the older Italian School, while the other dealt solely with the latest development of that form of art.

In Mr. Mapleson's prospectus there appeared very few names previously known in London; in fact the only ones were those of Mesdames Trebelli (who, for the reason already explained, did not appear), Tremelli, de Lussan, and Signori Frapolli, Padilla, and Galassi.

The start was unfortunate, for the chorus missed their train, and "Il Barbiere," the opera of the opening night, was given without their assistance.

An excellent Rosina was found in Madame Gargano, an

artist with a charming voice and excellent method, who was supported by a very capable Almaviva, in Signor Vicini ; while in the hands of Signor de Padilla, the part of Figaro was safe, and the orchestra, under Signor Bevignani, was highly satisfactory.

Mr. Mapleson, however, made a fatal mistake in supposing that Italian opera, unsupported by great stars, could succeed in London ; and this is probably the last occasion upon which such an enterprise will be attempted in this country. The performances were poorly attended, and formed a great contrast to the crowded houses which witnessed the "Meistersinger" and other operas at Covent Garden during the same summer.

Several of Donizetti's operas were given to small audiences, while a French work, Gounod's "Faust," fared much better at the hands of the public.

The crowning disaster, however, was the engagement of Madame Sembrich, who, happening to be in London for concert purposes, was secured by Mr. Mapleson for a few performances. Her entry as Lucia was announced, but, owing to illness, she never appeared, and the season ended as abruptly as had the one in 1887.

The venture certainly deserved more support than was accorded to it ; but it was conclusive in showing that the older form of Italian opera, even when presented with excellent Italian singers, is no longer popular in this country.

Mr. Mayer's season at the Lyceum was exclusively devoted to performances of Verdi's "Otello."

London had been waiting over two years for an opportunity of hearing this work, which, with the exception of Paris, had already been produced in almost every European capital.

Mr. Mayer had secured the celebrated La Scala orchestra, under Signor Faccio ; and also the services of Signor Tamagno the original Otello, and Monsieur Maurel the original Iago. The idea of relying solely on one work for an operatic season

was unusual, but the circumstances were exceptional, and the enterprise was a great success.

As regards the opera itself, it is a most interesting work, and shows the wonderful development of Verdi's style, and the continuance of his inspiration. It contains but one melody typical of the composer's earlier method, Iago's drinking song "In affia l'ingola ;" but the music throughout strikes one as being in perfect keeping with the libretto. Though Verdi, as regards "Otello," has been credited with Wagnerian tendencies, that opera is simply the outcome of those ideas which were developing in his later works. In the parts of Otello and Iago, Signor Tamagno and Monsieur Maurel cannot be too highly praised ; Madame Cataneo was the Desdemona.

The Lyceum, unfortunately, was somewhat small for the production of such a work ; while the possessor of so stupendous a voice as Signor Tamagno would have been heard to more advantage in a larger theatre.

The libretto of "Otello" came from the pen of Signor Boïto, the gifted composer of "Mefistofile."

In the early part of 1890 occurred the death of the Spanish tenor, Signor Gayarré : an event which, in his native country, was regarded as a national calamity.

It is not too much to say of this consummate artist, that, of recent years, there have been few tenors capable of so thoroughly carrying an audience with them ; indeed, so entirely did he accomplish this, and identify himself with a roll, that, in listening to him, any faults he may have possessed, were forgotten.

The spring of 1890 witnessed the return of the Carl Rosa Company to Drury Lane ; but the only event of note which occurred during the season was the production of a new opera by Mr. Cowen.

Sir Augustus Harris this year introduced an important innovation, for, in announcing his summer season, no list of singers or operas was communicated to the public. The season opened with Gounod's "Faust," a new Marguerite, in the

person of Madame Nuovina, appearing to the Faust of M. de Reszke.

Most of the previous year's successes were repeated, though without Madame Albani's valuable assistance.

The brothers de Reszke arrived in London much earlier than they had done either in 1888 or 1889; and their presence at the beginning of the season was of great advantage to the management.

A very successful début was made by a dramatic soprano of the first rank, Madame Tavary, who appeared as Donna Anna, Eva, and Elsa. Miss Macintyre also appeared in the last-named part.

An interesting event was the London début of Madame Richard, an artist already well known and deservedly popular in Paris, as leading contralto at the Grand Opera. She appeared as Fides, in "Le Prophète," which was given in French, as was each opera in which this artist appeared. Her Fides was much admired, as was M. de Reszke's assumption of the roll of the false prophet.

In the tenor department there also appeared during the season M. Montariol, Signor Ravelli, Signor Valero, and others.

"Romeo" and "Die Meistersinger," the great successes of 1889, were repeated, with Madame Melba in the former work, and Madame Tavary, a splendid Eva, in the latter. Madame Gerster, after a very lengthy absence, re-appeared; and the English tenor Mr. Barton Macguckin appeared as Lohengrin at Covent Garden.

Madame Nordica, as usual, proved herself a tower of strength, as did also Madame Melba and Mdlle. Ella Russell.

Towards the close of the season, Ambroise Thomas' "Hamlet" was mounted, with a powerful cast, including Mesdames Melba and Richard and Monsieur Lassalle in the leading parts. Both the last-named artists and Signor Francesco d'Andrade did most valuable work in the baritone department. The season, on the whole, was a successful one; the most notable new-comers being Mesdames Tavary and Richard.

As a rule, the house was well filled, and most of the best boxes and stalls were engaged for the entire series of performances.

Signori Bevignani, Mancinelli, and Randegger were the conductors.

The noticeable events of the season, not otherwise a particularly remarkable one, were that no prospectus, previous to its commencement, was issued concerning it ; and that, principally for the convenience of Madame Richard, the practice of performing operas in their own languages was considerably extended.

The autumn of 1890 brought Signor Lago again before the British public at Covent Garden. A prospectus containing the names of Mesdames Albani, Ella Russell, Macintyre, Fanny Moody, and MM. Gianini, Perotti, de Padilla, Galassi, and Victor Maurel, was issued ; and it promised productions of Gluck's "Orfeo," Meyerbeer's "Robert le Diable," and "L'Etoile du Nord," Ponchielli's "La Gioconda," and Wagner's "Tannhauser" ; all of which operas, contrary to the usual practice of a prospectus, were produced.

"Aïda," on the opening night, proved to be the most interesting event of the season, since it introduced Mdlle. Giulia Ravogli to the London public.

Into the merits of a singer so widely known and universally admired, it is unnecessary to enter ; and it will be sufficient to say that, after her splendid performance in the part of Amneris, and her immense success in Gluck's "Orfeo," she at once took that high place in the estimation of London opera-goers, which she has ever since retained.

On the opening night, Mdlle. Sophia Ravogli appeared as Aïda, and Signor Gianini as Rhadames.

Considering that theatre prices were the rule, some wonderful performances were given ; notably "Tannhauser," with Mesdames Albani and Sophia Ravogli, and MM. Perotti and Maurel. The great French baritone was a considerable attraction, and was very successful as Peter the Great, in a

welcome revival of Meyerbeer's "Etoile du Nord." The production of "Les Huguenots" was interesting on account of Madame Albani appearing, for the first time in this country, as Valentina.

The season was a success; and this result was no doubt largely due to the efforts of Mdlle. Giulia Ravogli.

In 1890 Sir Augustus Harris' summer season was a very long one, the opening night being in April, and the enterprise being carried on through May and June into July. But though so extended, the season did not present any feature of great interest in operatic history.

As in 1890, no preliminary prospectus was issued, and the practice of presenting operas in various languages was still further extended, with the result that the summer season was beginning to lose its character of "Royal Italian Opera," a name which the introduction of the cosmopolitan system has changed into "Royal Opera."

The long list of artists who appeared during the season, included Mesdames Albani, Nordica, Richard, Sophia and Giulia Ravogli, and MM. de Reszke, Maurel, Lassalle, and Devoyod; while the most important new-comers were Mesdames Eames and Sanderson, and Monsieur Van Dyk.

The production of Massinet's "Manon Lescaut," introduced Mdlle. Sanderson and M. Van Dyk. The American prima donna, as Manon, showed herself to be a good actress, and to be the possessor of a light soprano voice of most pleasing quality, which was not, however, sufficiently powerful for so large a theatre as Covent Garden.

The appearance of M. Van Dyk, who had been engaged to play the part of Parcival, at the Bayreuth Festival, was looked forward to with much interest in London: a fine actor and an accomplished vocalist, it was unfortunate that opera-goers did not have an opportunity of judging of him in a Wagnerian part during his first visit to this country.

"Orfeo" and "Tannhauser" were produced with casts almost identical to those presented by Signor Lago in the preceding

autumn. It is but fair to state, however, that both staging and general ensemble were much superior under Sir Augustus Harris. "Orfeo" again proved a great attraction, and Mdlle. Giulia Ravogli added considerably to her laurels. A Russian light soprano, Madame Mravina, appeared for the first time in England during the season, and was much appreciated as Queen Margherita de Valois, and in other parts. It should be mentioned that Meyerbeer's finest opera was given with the following cast, as powerful a one as the operatic stage could well produce:—Mesdames Albani, Mravina, and Giulia Ravogli, and MM. Jean and Eduard de Reszke, Maurel, and Lassalle.

No novelties were given during the season, though Verdi's "Otello" was new to Covent Garden. Of the individual performers in this opera, but one of the Lyceum cast was present, Monsieur Maurel. Madame Albani, with conspicuous advantage to the opera, appeared as Desdemona, and M. Jean de Reszke replaced Signor Tamagno as Otello. At a subsequent performance of "Otello," Mdlle. Eames, an American soprano, who had achieved great success at the Paris Grand Opera, replaced Madame Albani as Desdemona. She proved to be a valuable acquisition to the company, and has since become highly popular in this country.

"Die Meistersinger," "Le Prophète," and other successes of previous seasons were reproduced with familiar casts.

The undertaking, which lasted such an unusually long time, was, on the whole, a satisfactory one from every point of view; though, in the early part, audiences were not as large as might have been desired.

Before dismissing 1891, the production of Sir Arthur Sullivan's "Ivanhoe," which took place at the theatre which was to have been the home of English opera, but which has now become the Palace Theatre of Varieties, should be mentioned.

In the libretto of "Ivanhoe," there are some powerful situations, but the music, though containing some fine passages, does not at any time seem to rise to much dramatic intensity.

The opera, which was splendidly mounted, had a fairly long run.

It should also be mentioned that, in the autumn of the year, Signor Mascagni's "Cavalleria Rusticana" was first produced in England.



CHAPTER IV.

COSMOPOLITAN OPERA.

THE summer season of 1892 was one of the most gigantic operatic enterprises ever undertaken in this country.

From the fact that eighty-nine performances of twenty-seven operas were given in ten weeks, some idea can be formed of the tremendous activity displayed.

A special feature of the season was the engagement of German vocalists and a German orchestra, under Herr Mahler, which gave performances of the whole series of Wagner's "Ring," consisting of "Das Rheingold," "Die Walküre," "Siegfried," and "Die Götterdämmerung," and other works of his, as well as of Beethoven's "Fidelio" and Nesler's "Trompeter von Sackingen."

Thus the working of the cosmopolitan system was almost complete, and during this season at Covent Garden, operas in French, Italian, and German were heard.

The list of artists who appeared was a long one : it included, as far as French and Italian operas were concerned, Mesdames Melba, Nordica, Arnoldsen, Eames, de Lussan, Teleki, Sophia Ravogli, Valda, and Calvé ; among the contraltos, Mesdames Giulia Ravogli, Deschamps-Jehin, and Meisslinger ; among the tenors, MM. de Reszke, Dimitresco, de Lucia, Montariol, and Van Dyk ; among the baritones, MM. Maurel, Dufriche, Ceste, and Lassalle ; and among the basses MM. de Reszke, and Plancon. This large force was under the joint command of MM. Bevignani, Mancinelli, Randegger, and Jehin.

As regards the operas performed, Mascagni's "Cavalleria Rusticana" proved to be the most popular, as it was performed oftener than any other work.

In Madame Calvé, a dramatic soprano of the highest rank, was found the most perfect of Santuzzas; and it is unnecessary to relate how popular this consummate artist has since become.

Apart from its other great merits, Signor Mascagni's opera is interesting as being typical of that new form of Italian opera, which is chiefly remarkable for its brevity.

"L'Amico Fritz," a new opera, by the same composer, was also produced during the season, but, in popularity, this opera has never vied with "Cavalleria Rusticana."

Gounod's early opera, "Philemon et Bancis," produced this year, was a welcome addition to the repertory.

Other new works produced were Bemberg's "Elaine," and de Lara's "Light of Asia." Of the older operas, the most noteworthy representations were those of Mozart's "Don Giovanni" (M. Maurel in the title role), and "Le Nozze di Figaro," Gounod's "Faust" and "Romeo," Verdi's "Aida" (the only work of this composer's produced during the season), and Meyerbeer's "Le Prophète" and "Les Huguenots."

In all Wagner was represented by eight works; of which "Lohengrin" (performed both in Italian and German), "Siegfried," and "Tristan und Isolde," with Madame Klafsky, a superb Isolde, were performed oftenest, being each given four times. The presence of the well-known Wagnerian tenor, Herr Max Alvary, was a special feature of these performances.

Some overflow nights were given at Drury Lane; and, after the season had closed at Covent Garden, representations, including those of Mr. Fox's "Nydia," were continued at the first-named opera house.

The season of 1893 was carried on on lines somewhat similar to those of 1892, and great activity was again displayed in the production of twenty-five operas.

As in 1892, the opera most frequently performed belonged to the new Italian school, but on this occasion it was Signor Leoncavallo's "Pagliacci."

The performance was a most excellent one: Madame Melba being all that could be desired in the part of Nedda; while Signor Ancona, a baritone new to this country, likewise distinguished himself by his finished singing and powerful acting. "Cavalleria Rusticana" was generally performed with "Pagliacci," the brevity of the two works making it convenient to give them on the same night.

"Carmen," with a new heroine in the person of Madame Calvé, was one of the principal attractions of the season. It was a most artistic performance, and Madame Calvé, vocally superior to Mesdames Hauk and Galli-Marié, gave quite a new reading of the part.

Other interesting incidents were the revival of Halevy's "La Juive," and the production of "I Rantzau," another new opera by Signor Mascagni, which is now rarely heard in this country.

"L'Amico Fritz" was performed on several occasions. "Amy Robsart," a new work, by Signor Isadore de Lara, was produced with a strong cast, including Madame Calvé as the heroine, Madame Armond as Queen Elizabeth, M. Alvarez as Leicester, and M. Lassalle as Varney; Signor Bevignani being the conductor.

"The Veiled Prophet," an opera from the pen of Mr. Villiers Stamford, which was produced some years before in Germany, was heard for the first time in England during this season, and was most enthusiastically welcomed by London opera-goers.

Under the direction of Signor Mancinelli, and in the capable hands of Mesdames Nordica and Lucille Hill, and Signori Vignas and Ancona, an excellent rendering of the work was secured. Mr. Stamford's opera, like "Amy Robsart," was produced at the very end of the season, and was only once performed.

Another novelty, as far as London was concerned, was forthcoming in Bizet's "Djamileh," which was performed four times.

As in 1892, some interesting performances in German of "Tannhauser," "Die Walküre," "Tristan," "Siegfried," and "Die Meistersinger," were given; Frau Moran-Olden, and Herren Max Alvary, Lieban, and Wiegand being among the principal performers.

"Romeo," "Faust," "Lohengrin," and other standard works were given with familiar casts.

As regards new-comers, Signor Ancona has been already mentioned; and the company received a great addition to its strength in the person of M. Alvarez, a tenor well-known at the Paris Grand Opera. The very successful début made by Mr. David Bispham should also be noticed.

Towards the end of the season, the work became so heavy that a second orchestra was engaged. The results of these two seasons appear to show that operatic taste in this country had undergone a considerable change, and that the works of Wagner, of the French school, and of the new style, as represented by "Cavalleria Rusticana," and "Pagliacci," had come forward to the exclusion of the older schools, and especially of that school represented by Rossini, Donizetti, and Bellini.

After referring to performances of "Die Meistersinger," with Madame Albani and MM. J. and E. de Reszke, Wiegand, Dufriche, Hedmond, and Lassalle; of "Les Huguenots" with Mesdames Albani and Giulia Ravagli, and MM. Jean and Eduard de Reszke; it only remains to say that the season closed with a repetition of Gounod's "Faust," with Madame Melba and the brothers de Reszke in the principal parts.

The most important feature at Covent Garden, in 1894, was the very large number of works new to this country, which were produced.

Early in the season, Puccini's "Manon Lescaut," and Verdi's "Falstaff," were given with casts which, at any rate, in this country, are not deemed first class; but in each case the

singers engaged were fully equal to their work, and enjoyed the complete confidence of the composers concerned.

"Manon Lescaut" did not create a great sensation; and "Falstaff" did not certainly meet with the success so excellent a work deserved. In fact, Verdi's opera did not take the popular fancy; though, doubtless, the absence of stars, and the difficulty of following the music at a first hearing, may be held partly accountable for this result; though the variety, dignified gaiety, and originality of the work charmed musicians.

Among the artists who appeared in "Falstaff," were included the following:—Mesdames Olghina, Zilli, and Giulia Ravogli, and Signori Beduschi, Pini-Corsi, Arimondi, and Pessina, under the guidance of Signor Mancinelli.

Two new works from the pen of Massinet were heard; the most important of which was "Werther," an opera founded on Goethe's celebrated story, with Madame Eames and M. Jean de Reszke in the principal parts.

A most artistic interpretation of the work was secured, but "Werther" is too gloomy an opera to ever achieve lasting popularity.

One effect was certainly inartistic and in bad taste. Prior to Werther's death, when the curtain was down, and a most appropriate interlude was being played, a pistol shot was suddenly fired, with an effect which was not realistic.

As regards the same composer's "La Navarraise," the splendid performance of Madame Calvé, and the exciting interest of the story, even apart from the intrinsic merit of the work itself, made it an unqualified success.

Thus it will be seen that Massinet's two operas fared much better in the matter of performers than either Verdi's or Puccini's had done.

M. Bruneau's "L'Attaque du Moulin," adapted from M. Zola's contribution to "Les Soirées de Medan," made a decided hit; a result which the excellence both of Madame Delna and M. Bouvet materially helped to bring about.

Another London novelty was Mr. Cowen's "Signa," which

was twice performed ; and a new opera, "The Lady of Longford," which, though produced with the strong combination of Madame Eames and MM. Alvarez and Eduard de Reszke, was hardly a success.

"Faust," "Carmen," "Romeo," "Pagliacci," and "Cavalleria Rusticana," were heard oftenest during the season ; while German opera, at Covent Garden, was only represented by "Orfeo," "Meistersinger," and "Lohengrin." The latter branch of art, however, at Drury Lane, received all attention, where what might be called a subsidiary season went on simultaneously with the main one at Covent Garden.

The season of 1894 shows an almost unexampled record of hard work, and the unusually large number of new operas produced reflects the greatest credit on the management.

As regards singers, among the sopranos, Madame Melba was the most prominent ; while Madame Eames scored some decided hits—notably as Eva, in the "Meistersinger," and Madame Nuovina, a singer of great dramatic abilities, was duly appreciated.

In the performances of "Falstaff," Mdlle. Giulia Ravogli was much admired as Mistress Quickly.

MM. J. and E. de Reszke, Alvarez, Plancon, Cossira, de Lucia, Ancona, and Albers, all rendered most valuable assistance to the management, and two new singers, Signori Pessina and Pini-Corsi, were quite successful.

German opera, as has already been mentioned, was exclusively confined to Drury Lane, where two or three performances a week were given under the able direction of Herr Lohse ; the most remarkable feature of which was the brilliant series of performances by Frau Klafsky, who was well supported by Herr Max Alvary.

"Fidelio," "Tannhauser," "Tristan," "Die Walküre," and other works were produced. The revival of "Der Freischutz" was much appreciated, as Weber's great work is so rarely heard in London.

Financially, the Drury Lane season should have been a

success, as good houses were the rule ; though the performances, apart from the work of the two artists above mentioned, and Mr. Bispham, were not of the highest order.

The summer of 1895 was chiefly remarkable for the introduction of the English language at a Grand Opera season ; thus completely establishing the cosmopolitan system at the "Royal Opera ;" at which institution works from henceforward could be heard in English, French, German, and Italian, during the same season.

The first production in English was "Harold," music by Mr. Cowen, and libretto by Sir Edward Malet : an opera dealing, as its name implies, with the history of the last of the Saxon kings. Dignified or graceful, as the situation demanded, this work deservedly increased its composer's already high reputation.

As Edith, Madame Albani added another to her long list of triumphs ; while at the hands of Mr. David Bispham, the part of William of Normandy obtained ample justice. Mr. Brozel, however, was hardly suited to the role of Harold.

A larger number of great stars appeared this season, under Sir Augustus Harris, than had hitherto been the case, under his rule, at the Opera ; and, in addition to Madame Patti, such sopranos as Mesdames Albani, Sembrich, Melba, and Calvé, were heard ; but M. Jean de Reszke, for the first time since his tenor début in 1887, was not heard during the year.

A most effective substitute, however, was forthcoming in Signor Tamagno ; owing to whose presence, the services of the great Polish tenor, strange to say, were little missed. The former appeared to have moderated the vigour of his singing since he first appeared in this country, in 1889, with the result that his performances were even more effective than they were at that period of his career. In conjunction with Miss Macintyre, the Italian tenor had the honour of appearing before Her Majesty, in a "command" performance of "Il Trovatore," at Windsor Castle.

The opening night presented Verdi's "Otello" in the more than capable hands of Madame Albani and Signori Tamagno and Pessina. The production of "Le Prophète" was a triumph alike for Mdlle. Giulia Ravogli, who appeared as Fides, and for Signor Tamagno as the false prophet. "Otello" was repeated late in the season, with a change of cast, Mdlle. Macintyre replacing Madame Albani, and Monsieur Maurel, the greatest of all Iago's, replacing Signor Pessina.

Madame Patti, for the first time since 1885, appeared at Covent Garden, being welcomed back to the scene of so many former triumphs by immense audiences.

As Rosina, in "Il Barbiere," the great prima donna showed herself once again to be the first of Rossinian singers; in "La Traviata," the most brilliant Violetta on the stage; and in "Don Giovanni," the most charming of all Zerlinas.

Madame Sembrich, after an absence of eleven years, was also most cordially welcomed back in "La Traviata," and in other of those parts which have made this brilliant light soprano's name so famous: and in Madame Bellincioni, opera-goers had the interesting experience of witnessing the part of Somtuzza, in "Cavalleria Rusticana," played by its original exponent.

"Carmen," with the unprecedently strong cast of Mesdames Calvé (Carmen), and Melba (Michaela), and Monsieur Alvarez; "Les Huguenots," with Mesdames Albani, Melba, and Giulia Ravogli, and MM. Tamagno, Ancona, and Plancon, are performances which should be mentioned.

Verdi's "Falstaff," with Mesdames de Lussan, Joran, and Giulia Ravogli, and Monsieur Maurel, in his original part of Falstaff, was an interesting production; while "Lucia," with Madame Melba, came as a welcome change.

Mozart's "Le Nozze di Figaro" was given with the following strong cast:—Mesdames Sembrich, Eames, and Giulia Ravogli, and MM. Maurel and Ancona: and an opera by a native composer, Mr. Alick Maclean, which had been success-

ful in a prize competition, was heard at Covent Garden this season.

The series closed with a performance of "Romeo" (Madame Melba and M. Alvarez); on which occasion, a baton was presented to Signor Mancinelli, who, ably assisted by Signori Bevignani, Randegger, and Seppilli, had conducted throughout the season with his usual care and skill.

An English season at Covent Garden, in the autumn of 1895, requires but passing notice. Some good performances under the direction of Herr Feld were given of "Lohengrin," "Tannhäuser," "Flying Dutchman," "Walküre," "Cavalleria Rusticana," and other operas. The vocalists included Mesdames Macintyre, Esty, Olitzka, and Recoshowitz, and MM. Brozel, Hedmondt, Ludwig, and Bispham.

The season closed in the middle of November.

The summer of 1896 was marked by the death of Sir Augustus Harris, as disastrous an event, as regards operatic affairs in this country as could well have happened.

The year opened sadly: in its early days occurred the death of the greatest of English conductors, Sir Joseph Barnby, who, in spite of the fact that the principal work of his life was devoted to oratorio and not to opera, must always hold an honourable place in operatic history, on account of the production of "Parcival," under his direction, in 1884.

The two performances then given at the Albert Hall of Wagner's last opera, are the only ones hitherto heard in this country.

Lamented alike by oratorio-goers, students, and lovers of church music throughout all English-speaking countries, his loss was most universally felt; while in the great Choral Society over which he had so long presided, each individual member mourned a revered leader and a personal friend.

The operatic season opened with "Romeo"; Madame Eames being the Juliette, and M. Jean de Reszke (after a two years' absence from England), the Romeo; and it closed on the 29th of July, with a repetition of the same opera, Madame Melba

and M. Alvarez taking the leading parts. A variety of languages was used during the season, and "Tannhauser" was performed in French; this experiment, however, in spite of the efforts of M. Alvarez, can hardly be called a conspicuous success. The season was essentially a German one, the majority of operas produced being by composers of that nationality.

Madame Albani and M. Jean de Reszke appeared in Wagner's "Tristan," which was the most striking success of the year. The Canadian prima donna also appeared, for the first time in London, as Donna Anna, in "Don Giovanni," in which great roll her success was unqualified. Besides her welcome assumption of these two new roles, she appeared as Valentina, Gilda, Violetta, and Elsa.

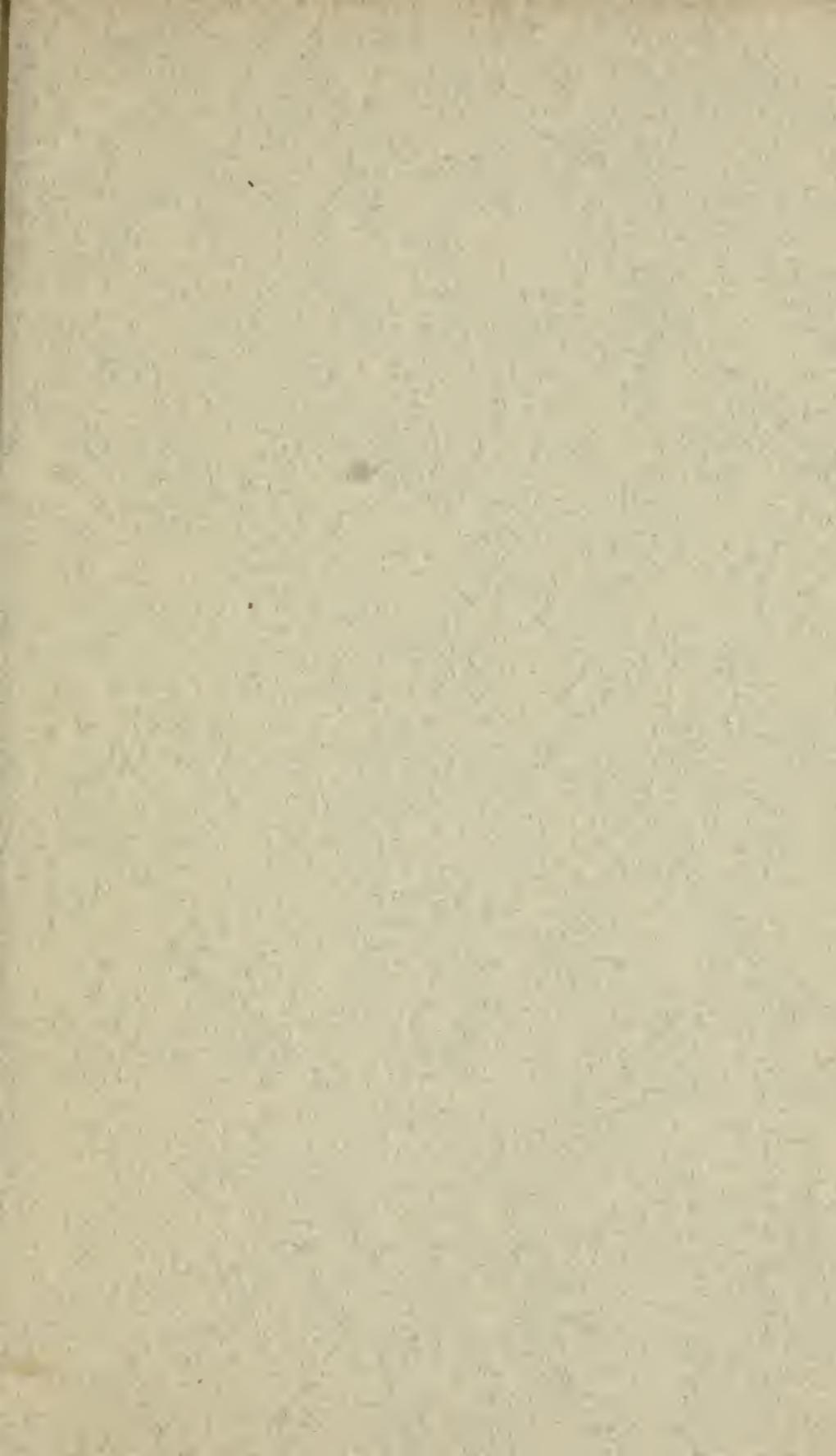
"Carmen" was given but twice; and "Cavalleria Rusticana" was not performed so frequently as usual.

"Les Huguenots" was presented with one of those strong combinations to which Sir Augustus Harris has accustomed us; Madame Albani was Valentina, and Madame Melba, Queen Margherita de Valois.

"Hansel and Gretel" was performed in English. The soprano element, though not so powerful as in 1895, was most efficient, comprising, in addition to those already mentioned, Miss Macintyre (who appeared as Aida, Marguerite, in both Gounod's and Boïto's operas, and in other parts), Mdlle. de Lussan, and Mdlle. Marie Engle. The contraltos were not so strong as usual, though Madame Mantelli worked hard and successfully. The tenors, among whom were MM. de Reszke, Alvarez, Bounard, de Lucia, Cremonina, and Lucignani, were numerous and efficient; and the baritones and basses included the names of MM. Ancona, Albers, Plancon, and E. de Reszke.

In spite of the unhappy event which cast such a cloud over it, the season was a success.

Thus ends the Harris operatic régime, which lasted nine years, and into which short space of time so many important events are crowded.







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